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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8161  
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEPVA/COMJSOC FT BRAGG NC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 7457

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STATE FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - PUNTLAND ELECTION UPDATE: FRONT-RUNNERS,  
CRITERIA, AND BRIBES

REF: 08 NAIROBI 2899

11. (U) Summary: On the eve of the presidential election in Puntland, observers tell us that General Abdullahi Ahmed Jama is the front-runner. The electoral commission very belatedly announced on January 6 a series of registration criteria for candidates. The electioneering, it is rumored, has been driven in part by payments to the MPs who will be doing the voting. End summary.

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The Front Runner  
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12. (U) Observers of the Puntland presidential election, which is scheduled for January 8, report the election process has gone relatively smoothly to date. Reports indicate that General Abdullahi Ahmed Jama is the current front-runner, although the outcome cannot be predicted with certainty, as it hinges on the votes of only 66 bribery-susceptible MPs. Jama, an American citizen and former General during the Siad Barre regime, is rumored to have close relations with recently-resigned Transitional Federal Government President Abdullahi Yusuf. Among the other strong candidates at this stage are incumbent Mohamed Muse Hersi, as well as Abdirahman Mohamed Faroole, and Ali Abdi Aware.

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Criteria for Candidacy  
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13. (U) On January 6, the election commission belatedly announced a series of requirements for candidates for the presidency and vice presidency. Among them are:

-- a qualification fee of \$5000 for presidential candidates and \$2500 for vice-presidential candidates. One contact guessed that some of this money would be used to fund security for the elections, with the remainder going to "administrative expenses."

-- a resume, to be submitted by January 6.

-- a workplan, to be submitted by January 7.

14. (U) We are told that the nine remaining candidates met all of the conditions. Four candidates for Vice President also fulfilled the requirements. (See reftel for thumbnail bios of candidates.)

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Security Situation  
Drives MPs' Decisions  
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15. (U) Many of the 66 MPs who will vote by secret ballot on January 8 have set up elaborate mechanisms for receipt of bribes from the candidates, we are told. Several candidates have set up offshore accounts through which they have allegedly moved money to the MPs who will determine the outcome. However, one source told us that the worsening security situation in Puntland, not bribes, will in fact determine many MPs' votes in this race.

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